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Summary record of the 3rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 5 October 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Macedo ..... (Mexico)

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98-81438 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

1. **The Chairman** expressed his sincere condolences to the Governments of countries which had recently been devastated by a hurricane and to families of the victims, and expressed the hope that the international community would provide them with prompt assistance.

Agenda item 18: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (A/53/23 (Parts II, V–IX); A/AC.109/2102–2104, 2106–2110, 2112–2118)

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Agenda item 12: Report of the Economic and Social Council

Agenda item 90: Offers by Member States of study and training facilities for inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories (A/53/262 and Add.1)

2. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic), Rapporteur of the Special Committee, introduced the chapters of the report covering the Special Committee's work in 1998 under agenda items 18, 87, 88 and 89, as contained in document A/53/23 (Parts II–IX). Part I of the report would be considered directly in plenary meeting.

3. After reviewing the Special Committee's activities in 1998, he introduced the main proposals, recommendations and decisions, which were contained in various parts of document A/53/23. He addressed such questions as the elimination of the remaining manifestations of colonialism, the dispatch of visiting missions to the Non-Self-Governing Territories in order to facilitate the full, speedy and effective implementation of the Declaration, the widest possible dissemination of information on decolonization and the inalienable right of the peoples of the Territories to their natural resources and their right to establish and maintain control over the future development of those resources.

4. The Special Committee had also made recommendations on the presence of military bases and installations in the Non-Self-Governing Territories which could impede the exercise by the peoples of their right to self-determination. It had recommended that the General Assembly should urge the administering Powers not to involve those Territories in any offensive acts or interference conducted against other States, and should reiterate that the colonial and Non-Self-Governing Territories and areas adjacent thereto should not be used for nuclear testing, dumping of nuclear wastes or deployment of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

5. The Special Committee had given particular attention to international assistance to the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations. It had emphasized in particular aid to the small island Territories and had recommended the strengthening of existing measures of support and the formulation of appropriate programmes of assistance in order to accelerate progress in the economic and social sectors. It had also reiterated the need for the administering Powers to continue to transmit information under Article 73 *e* of the Charter.

6. In accordance with its mandate, the Special Committee had continued to monitor the situation in each Territory. Parts V to IX of its report contained its recommendations to the General Assembly on individual Territories.

7. The Special Committee had welcomed the developments that had taken place in New Caledonia and the signing of the Nouméa Accord on 6 May 1998. It had made recommendations on 10 small island Territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific and had reaffirmed the responsibility of the administering Powers, especially with regard to the economic and social development of the Territories and measures to counter drug trafficking, money laundering and other offences. It had also made recommendations on developments in Tokelau and Guam. It had again noted with appreciation the exemplary cooperation of New Zealand with the Special Committee.

8. The active participation of representatives of territorial Governments and administering Powers in the regional seminars organized by the Special Committee had served to keep the Special Committee informed of developments in the Territories. It had taken note of the comments and observations of the representatives and had reflected them in many of its recommendations to the General Assembly.

9. As the end of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism approached, the Special Committee and the United Nations must redouble their efforts to free the world of colonialism. The Special Committee intended to do its utmost to achieve that end. It would assess the effectiveness of its activities with a view to making any improvements it considered necessary.

10. Pursuant to suggestions, some of which had already been discussed informally, the Special Committee could establish a procedure to consult the administering Powers on the progress made in the implementation of the Declaration and obtain their agreement before sending visiting missions. It might also discuss aid to the Non-Self-Governing Territories, particularly in the context of sustainable development, in the course of joint meetings with the Economic and Social Council. It might further organize specialized meetings with parliamentarians on decolonization issues. It would be desirable to publish a work devoted to decolonization and a compendium of all the General Assembly resolutions on the subject, and to establish a home page on decolonization on the Internet. Articles on decolonization could be included in United Nations publications, special activities could be organized with the press and information kits could be prepared for dissemination in schools.

11. **Mr. Rodriguez Parilla** (Cuba), Acting Chairman of the Special Committee, said that, despite the undeniable progress made since the adoption of the Declaration, there was still a long way to go before colonialism was eliminated. Cuba was ready to do everything possible to help the Special Committee to attain its goal.

12. The Special Committee had on various occasions drawn the attention of the international community to the problems confronting the Non-Self-Governing Territories, many of which were small islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific with special needs in terms of socio-economic development and the protection of the environment. It was essential for the international community to assist the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories to improve their living standards and to explore new ways of enabling them to choose freely their own destiny. In order to build their capacities in preparation for full self-government, the peoples of the Territories must be able to benefit from United Nations programmes in the economic and social fields, including those deriving from the plans of action of international conferences.

13. The Committee had continued its consultations with representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories and the administering Powers, whose cooperation was indispensable for the achievement of the goals stated in the 1960 Declaration. The Committee welcomed its collaboration with New Zealand and Portugal and, in 1998, for the first time with France.

14. It was essential for the Committee to be able to obtain first-hand information on the aspirations of peoples by conducting visiting missions. The regional seminars which had been organized had been extremely useful from that point of view, since they had enabled the Committee to acquaint itself with the thinking of the representatives of the Territories, administering Powers, non-governmental organizations and experts on specific problems in the Territories and to find out what role it believed the Special Committee and the United Nations should play in the process of decolonization, in particular with respect to assistance to colonial peoples.

15. The participants in the seminar held at Nadi (Fiji) in 1998 had emphasized, *inter alia*, the need to find practical solutions for the eradication of colonialism, through an independent mediator if necessary, so that the inalienable rights of the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories were protected, even in cases where such Territories had themselves decided to conclude a free association agreement with an independent State or to become part of one. It was that mediating role which the Special Committee and the United Nations should play as long as there were Non-Self-Governing Territories.

16. The Committee, which each year summarized its work in the reports it submitted to the General Assembly, had decided to carry out a new evaluation of its activities in order to improve its effectiveness in all areas where that was necessary. Such an evaluation was all the more important as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism drew to a close.

17. He urged the members of the Fourth Committee to accept the recommendations the Special Committee was submitting to the General Assembly in order to put an end to all forms of colonialism.

18. **Ms. Smith** (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) said that in her delegation's previous statements to the Fourth Committee, it had always emphasized the seriousness with which the United Kingdom viewed its responsibilities towards the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. The United Kingdom had always made it clear that the wishes of the peoples concerned, exercised in accordance with the other principles and rights set out in the Charter of the United Nations and other international treaties, were of paramount importance. The United Kingdom had always affirmed that it was prepared to consider any proposals

about their future put forward by the peoples of the Territories themselves.

19. The United Kingdom's relations with its dependent Territories were based on the principle of self-determination. That was also the position taken by the Special Committee, at least on paper. It was however regrettable that its perception of the concept of self-determination differed from that of the United Kingdom, and that it continued to apply that concept selectively. Although self-determination meant the freedom to choose one's own identity, identity was not synonymous with independence, and the Territories which had chosen to remain British had done so for a variety of good reasons, without coercion, and the peoples concerned had always had the opportunity to make their views known. Her delegation therefore called on the Special Committee to recognize those facts.

20. A little more than a year earlier, the incoming British Government had launched a major review of the United Kingdom's relationship to its remaining dependent Territories. It had examined in depth how to develop, strengthen and modernize that relationship, giving the maximum possible weight to the views of the Territories concerned and asking the democratically elected governments of the Territories whether they wished to see any fundamental changes in the Constitutional relationship. The Territories had unanimously expressed their wish to retain the link with the United Kingdom. It was hoped that the recommendations emanating from that review would be laid before the British Parliament in a White Paper by the end of 1998.

21. Some key changes had been implemented to update and improve the United Kingdom's dealings with its Non-Self-Governing Territories, and those changes symbolized the Government's commitment to new, strengthened relationships with those Territories. In June 1998, a new Overseas Territories Department had been formed in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. For the first time, a Minister for the Overseas Territories had been appointed, and the designation of the Territories had been changed. They were to be referred to as United Kingdom Overseas Territories to better reflect the spirit of the new relationship between the United Kingdom and those Territories.

22. The Special Committee should be as open to change and ready to review its relationship with the Territories as the Government of the United Kingdom had been. It should be ready to recognize not only that the colonial era was over, but also that many of its ideas about the nature of life in the Territories were preconceived and outdated. Even the designation "Non-Self-Governing" was, in many cases, clearly inappropriate, as many of those Territories had already attained the high degree of democratic self-government which the Committee purported to seek for them. Furthermore, in fulfilment of its obligation under the Charter of the United Nations, the United Kingdom regularly submitted to the United Nations detailed information on developments in that respect.

23. In recent years the Special Committee had shown, through its amendments to certain resolutions recommended to the Fourth Committee, that it was open to efforts to better reflect the reality of contemporary relationships between administering Powers and Territories. Her delegation continued to welcome such flexibility, and hoped that trend would continue. It also welcomed the recent indication that the Committee would be prepared to take a fresh look at its work and future activities, in particular in relation to the administering Powers. She recalled that a year earlier the United Kingdom and the United States had expressed their position on some of those issues to the Special Committee.

24. In conclusion, she stressed that the establishment of a constructive relationship between the Special Committee and the administering Powers lay in dialogue based on mutual confidence, and hoped that that fact would be borne in mind when the Fourth Committee examined the various resolutions over the next few days.

25. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that if there was an area in which the United Nations could take justified pride in having done the right thing by working for freedom, it was that of decolonization, since, with the upsurge of awareness brought about by the great liberation movement of the 1950s, the right of peoples to self-determination had become established as an inalienable universal right.

26. He cited the conditions under which the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples had been adopted, and said that the fact that so many countries formed part of the Organization was due not only to the tremendous sacrifices made by millions of women and men, but also, in part, to the untiring efforts of the Special Committee.

27. However, 17 Territories were still living under the yoke of colonialism. The administering Powers should be urged to make a commitment to fruitful and sincere cooperation with the Special Committee so that the peoples of those Territories could be put in a position to decide on their ultimate status.

28. The next session of the Special Committee, which would coincide with the end of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, could present an opportunity to review the work undertaken during the Decade and to define future action.

29. It was more important than ever for the international community to support the Special Committee and the General Assembly, which must remain the forum to which peoples under colonial domination turned in order to make their voices heard and to demand their freedom.

30. Turning to the question of Western Sahara, he said he was pleased that Mr. James Baker, the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, had succeeded in bringing the Kingdom of Morocco and Frente POLISARIO to an understanding concerning modalities for implementation of the Settlement Plan and the holding of a free, fair referendum on self-determination. A year after the signing of the Houston agreements, Algeria welcomed the progress towards implementation of the Settlement Plan and identification of those eligible to participate in the referendum.

31. However, serious problems remained. There was still a need for lasting consolidation of the progress made in the area of identification, which must be carried out in strict compliance with the Houston Agreement and the Settlement Plan. It was also necessary to ensure the timely implementation of the other provisions of the Plan, particularly those involving the registration and repatriation of refugees by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which had not yet been given access to the entire Western Sahara, and the deployment of the engineering and demining units, which had not begun until six months after the Security Council's authorization. Lastly, it was important to ensure that neither party violated any part of the Plan and that every precaution was taken to prevent further obstacles to implementation of the Settlement Plan from arising.

32. It was essential for the United Nations to conclude status-of-forces agreements (SOFA) with Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria in order to allow the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to carry out its mandate in an appropriate manner. Algeria would sign that agreement in the next few days.

33. Algeria, which, as a neighbour and an observer State, had always worked hard to promote a definitive solution to the question of Western Sahara, solemnly called on both parties to fulfil effectively the commitments which they had made. It would continue to offer its full support to the Secretary-General, his Personal Envoy and his Special Representative in their efforts to achieve full and fair implementation of the Settlement Plan.

34. His Government also wished to stress the General Assembly's responsibility with respect to the question of Western Sahara and seeing the settlement process through to the end. The Assembly must remain extremely alert and resolute in monitoring fulfilment of the obligations of both parties. It must lend its full moral authority in support of the actions of the Security Council and the Secretary-General so that the referendum on self-determination could be organized under United Nations auspices as quickly as possible.

35. Only the holding of a free, fair and impartial referendum that would give a voice to the people of the Western Sahara could put an end to that conflict, which had lasted too long, and provide the long-awaited impetus to the establishment of the unified, stable and prosperous Maghreb which was the hope of all the peoples of the region.

36. **Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), speaking on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the United Nations had had a number of important achievements since its inception. One which many considered to be a major triumph was the fact that a large number of countries had exercised their right to self-determination and had attained independence following the adoption in 1960 of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. However, the decolonization process had yet to be completed, and there were still a number of Non-Self-Governing Territories which had not had the opportunity to freely determine their future political status.

37. ASEAN wished to reaffirm its support for the principle of self-determination, the goal of which was the elimination of colonialism irrespective of the geographical location of the territories concerned or the size of their population. It also affirmed the legitimacy of all options for self-determination consistent with General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV), the latter of which set forth modalities for the implementation of decolonization and self-determination. In that regard, ASEAN considered it essential to create conditions which would allow the peoples of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories to freely exercise their sacred right to choose their own destiny.

38. ASEAN welcomed the fact that the Special Committee had opted for a practical and innovative approach to its work, and it would continue to support the Committee's effort to achieve decolonization. However, it was of the view that the decolonization process was not merely a set of political measures but must be accompanied by effective efforts in the field of social and economic development. First and foremost, it was the responsibility of the administering Powers, in consultation with the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, to facilitate programmes of political education in order to foster those peoples' awareness of their options for self-determination. They should also promote balanced

economic development so that those peoples could achieve a basic level of self-sufficiency. At the same time, the United Nations and its specialized agencies should expand their programmes of assistance to the Non-Self-Governing Territories and continue to give priority to the strengthening and diversification of their economies; the crucial role of education and development, including human-centred development, should also be taken into account. Lastly, in planning socio-economic activities, it was essential to take into account the needs and interests of the peoples concerned, whose environment and cultural heritage must be preserved.

39. ASEAN also wished to emphasize the importance of obtaining and disseminating information from the Non-Self-Governing Territories as called for in Article 73 *e* of the Charter. In that regard, the United Nations should explore various alternatives, including United Nations visiting missions, regional seminars and other options.

40. There had been positive developments in some Non-Self-Governing Territories during the past year, and ASEAN very much hoped that similar progress would be achieved elsewhere. Lastly, he reaffirmed the commitment of ASEAN to implementation of General Assembly resolution 46/181 on the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, of which the goal, the achievement of a world free of colonialism, was, fortunately, within the international community's reach but which could be achieved only through a spirit of cooperation and compromise based on equity, mutual trust and mutual advantage.

41. **Mr. Tejeira** (Panama), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the decolonization process was not complete and that there were still 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, most of them in the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean.

42. Nevertheless, the States members of the Rio Group recognized that decolonization was an area in which the United Nations had achieved remarkable success and a goal to which the Group had committed itself unequivocally, a fact which had made it possible for over 80 of its current members to achieve independence. In particular, he welcomed the Special Committee's important contribution to the cause of decolonization and noted that the Special Committee had emphasized the need for the administering Powers to establish conditions which would allow the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination, freely and without interference of any kind, in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV). Those States also welcomed the progress achieved in that regard by New Zealand and other administering Powers.

43. They also wished to mention the progress made in 1998 on the question of New Caledonia, and the cooperative spirit shown by France. It was their view that the Nouméa Accord, which had been freely negotiated by the parties, would ensure the transition while agreement was awaited on the final status of the Territory.

44. The States members of the Rio Group urged the administering Powers to again undertake to create the political, social, economic and cultural conditions that would allow Non-Self-Governing Territories to face the future with confidence. In that context, they recalled the note that the Acting Chairman of the Special Committee had addressed to the administering Powers, in which he had proposed that missions should be sent to certain Non-Self-Governing Territories, in accordance with the wishes expressed by the people of the Territories concerned.

45. The seminars were an invaluable source of information, especially as the administering Powers did not provide all the information due from them under the Charter of the United Nations. The participation of representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, States Members of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations made it possible for the Special Committee to obtain first-hand information on the situation in the Territories concerned. In that regard, the States members of the Rio Group welcomed the successful seminar that had been held in Nadi, Fiji, in June 1998.

46. They further urged the administering Powers to take effective measures with a view to preserving and guaranteeing the inalienable right of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories to their natural resources and their right to establish and freely exercise control over the future development of those resources. They considered that nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction should under no conditions be deployed or stockpiled in the Territories and their adjacent areas.

47. The States members of the Rio Group welcomed the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the question of East Timor and paid particular tribute to the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. They noted with satisfaction that it might be possible to involve the population of East Timor more directly in the search for a solution, and that the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and Portugal had decided to establish interest sections in their respective capitals before the end of 1998.

48. They also welcomed the report of the Secretary-General dated 11 September 1998 (S/1998/849) on the situation concerning Western Sahara, which noted that significant progress had been made in the identification process. They

were convinced that the outstanding matters mentioned in the report could be rapidly resolved, and they wished to acknowledge and encourage the efforts made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and his Personal Envoy with a view to finding a compromise which would make it possible, without further delay, to hold a just and impartial referendum on the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, in accordance with the Settlement Plan accepted by both parties and the Houston agreements concluded in September 1997. They hoped that both parties to those agreements would cooperate fully in order to find a definitive solution to the problem of Western Sahara.

49. The States members of the Rio Group reaffirmed their conviction that the excellent bilateral relations between the Governments of the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom would make it possible to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the dispute between the two countries over sovereignty of the Malvinas, Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Special Committee.

50. Reaffirming their total commitment to the decolonization process, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, resolution 1514 (XV) and the other relevant General Assembly and Special Committee resolutions, and to the lofty objectives of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism in all Territories, the States members of the Rio Group urged the General Assembly to provide the Special Committee with every support for the enormous task which it had still to complete.

51. **Mr. Shen Guofang** (China) said that one of the most important achievements of the United Nations had been the assistance it had provided to a number of colonies in casting off the yoke of colonial rule and achieving independence. The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples adopted in 1960 had greatly accelerated the pace of decolonization and changed the composition of the United Nations and the structure of inter-State relations.

52. At the same time, however, the decolonization process had not yet been completed, and there were still more than a dozen Non-Self-Governing Territories around the world. The United Nations would have to make even greater efforts in order to achieve its decolonization goals by the end of the century.

53. The Chinese Government and people had always supported the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories in their struggle for self-determination and independence. His delegation believed that the pertinent principles laid down in the Charter of the United Nations and the aforementioned Declaration were still of practical relevance. He noted that the Charter of the United Nations, the Declaration and the relevant General Assembly resolutions accorded the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories the inalienable right to self-determination. If that right was to be exercised, all the parties concerned, including the United Nations, the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories and the administering Powers, should pool their endeavours, and the administering Powers must cooperate even more closely with the United Nations and the peoples of the Territories which they administered.

54. The dissemination of information on decolonization and the regional seminars in which the representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories participated were an effective means of gaining information about the will and the situation of the peoples of those Territories. His delegation was in favour of the United Nations sending more inspection teams to the Territories, and hoped that the administering Powers would cooperate fully with the United Nations, ensure that the peoples of the Territories fully understood their rights, continue to supply relevant data and accept the visit by inspection teams to the Territories under their administration.

55. Since the economies of Non-Self-Governing Territories tended to be more vulnerable than other economies, increased assistance should be given to those Territories in order to help them establish a sound economic base. The administering Powers were duty-bound to promote the socio-economic development of the Territories they administered and to help diversify their economies. The foreign interest groups working in those Territories should take full account of the interests and wishes of the local population and protect the natural and human resources of the Territories concerned. At the same time, the specialized agencies and the other institutions associated with the United Nations should continue to take all necessary measures to help improve the socio-economic life of the Territories.

56. In the past year the Special Committee, under the chairmanship of the Ambassador of Cuba, had demonstrated that it was working actively to complete the decolonization process. The progress made by Tokelau and New Caledonia in reaching agreement on relevant issues with their respective administering Powers marked an important step in the self-determination process. Furthermore, the Special Committee had adopted a separate resolution on the question of Guam, and the Acting Chairman had submitted to the members of the Special Committee a non-paper containing numerous proposals on strengthening the future work of the Committee.

57. Noting that the approach of the twenty-first century meant that the decolonization work of the United Nations was even more urgent, he said that the Chinese delegation was prepared to participate actively in those endeavours and to cooperate closely to that end with other members of the Committee.

58. **Mr. Guani** (Uruguay) said that he unreservedly supported the statement made by the Panamanian delegation on behalf of the member States of the Rio Group. However, he wished to make a number of further comments. His delegation was gravely concerned by the fact that 17 Territories were not yet self-governing.

59. With a view to updating the Plan of Action for the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, his delegation proposed that the fullest possible evaluation of the progress achieved during the Decade should be made. The Committee should look ahead to the year 2000, which would mark the end of the Decade, so that the desired measures could be taken to realize the Decade's final objective, namely "the free exercise of the right to self-determination by the peoples of each and every remaining Non-Self-Governing Territory".

60. Recalling the progress achieved in connection with Tokelau and East Timor, he said that a mechanism should be established for evaluating the situation concerning implementation of the Plan of Action and for setting precise objectives as to how the United Nations would perform its decolonization function in the future, with a view to obtaining the cooperation of the administering Powers. In order to bring the parties closer together, the Committee should ensure that such mechanism was not regarded as having a mandate that was incompatible with the interests of those Powers, thus making it possible to define the framework of the decolonization activities to be undertaken by the United Nations in the new millennium.

61. His delegation welcomed the fact that New Zealand had, by its example, led the way for sending missions to the Territories.

62. Turning to the question of Western Sahara, he reiterated his delegation's satisfaction with the progress accomplished within the framework of the Houston agreements, which had permitted a rapprochement between the Moroccan Government and Frente POLISARIO. Those agreements constituted an appropriate framework for the formulation of a peace plan which would lead to the holding of an impartial, just and free referendum that would make it possible to find, once and for all, an equitable and democratic solution to the problem of decolonization. The General Assembly should guarantee the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination.

63. His delegation welcomed the fact that the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom were endeavouring to reach a satisfactory solution to the problem of the Malvinas.

64. **Mr. Melendez-Barahona** (El Salvador), speaking on behalf of Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, hailed the successes which the United Nations had achieved in the field of decolonization since 1945. Many countries had attained independence or united freely with other independent States by exercising their right to self-determination and had become full Members of the United Nations. Palau, the last Trust Territory, had gained independence in 1994. It was nonetheless imperative that the peoples who had not yet acquired autonomy should be able to exercise their right to self-determination and independence.

65. He reaffirmed the relevance of Article 73 of Chapter XI (Declaration regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories) of the Charter, which stressed the principle that the interests of the inhabitants were paramount and stated the responsibilities of the administering Powers. He also emphasized the importance to the decolonization process of resolution 1514 (XV) and other relevant General Assembly resolutions, as well as the proclamation of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism and the Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations.

66. It was gratifying that the administering Powers had declared themselves willing to cooperate with the Special Committee, provide it with information on the situation of the Non-Self-Governing Territories and authorize it to send visiting missions that would enable it to be directly informed on the situation and aspirations of the inhabitants.

67. The countries on behalf of which he spoke were also pleased to note the progress which had resulted from the contacts between Indonesia and Portugal in East Timor.

68. They were pleased by the progress achieved, in conjunction with the two immediately concerned parties, in the implementation of the Settlement Plan regarding the question of Western Sahara and the identification of those eligible to take part in the referendum. They supported the efforts being made by the Secretary-General with a view to organizing a free, just and impartial referendum within the framework of which the people of Western Sahara could exercise their right to self-determination.

69. They were ready to support the claims of peoples who decided to exercise their sovereign right to self-determination and independence. As Member States, they felt obliged to fulfil the international responsibilities incumbent on them, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter and those of

international law, United Nations resolutions and the international instruments which they had signed. They welcomed the Secretary-General's decision, at the end of 1997, to maintain a decolonization programme in the Department of Political Affairs and to provide the Decolonization Unit with the resources needed to fulfil its mandate until the end of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

70. The majority of Member States were ready to support the United Nations in achieving the objectives of the Decade and in enabling all the Non-Self-Governing Territories to exercise their right to self-determination by the end of the millennium.

71. Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and El Salvador reiterated their support of United Nations action for decolonization. At the time of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international community should take concrete measures to ensure that the non-self-governing peoples realized their aspirations and that the rights articulated in that instrument prevailed.

72. **Ms. Smith** (United Kingdom), speaking in exercise of the right of reply following the statements made by the representatives of Panama, Uruguay and El Salvador on the question of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and other Territories of the South Atlantic, stated that the United Kingdom position on that question was well known and had been explained by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom when he had spoken in exercise of his right of reply to the Argentine Minister for Foreign Affairs in the plenary Assembly on 22 September 1998.

Requests for hearings

73. **The Chairman** informed delegations that he had received communications containing requests for hearings concerning Guam, the implementation of the Declaration, New Caledonia and Western Sahara, as well as communications from the Governor of Guam and the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, who wished to speak in connection with those Territories before the Committee. He suggested that, in accordance with the usual practice, the 11 communications should be circulated as Committee documents and considered at the next meeting.

74. **Mr. Snoussi** (Morocco) wished to know the names of the petitioners for Western Sahara.

75. **The Chairman** read out the names of the persons concerned, as well as the names of the organizations to which they belonged.

76. **Mr. Snoussi** (Morocco) wondered what link the petitioners in question, apart from those of Saharan origin, claimed that would qualify them to speak on Western Sahara, which was the only Territory for which the Committee accepted petitioners. His delegation wished to know whether any rules existed on the subject.

77. **The Chairman** said that he did not know what the link between the petitioners in question and the problem of Western Sahara was but that the petitioners would explain it. At the present stage, it was a matter of determining whether the communications should be circulated and not a matter of making decisions on the substance of the requests, which delegations would be able to do once they had familiarized themselves with them. In the absence of any objections, he would take it that the Committee agreed that the requests for hearings should be circulated with a view to their consideration at the next meeting.

78. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.